

Situation in Chechnya

Q. Mr. President, the events in Chechnya in the last 2 days, has that raised doubts about the Russian commitment to a political dialog?

President Clinton. Well, I think they made clear that they were going to try to continue their military offensive. What we've done at the OSCE is, it got them to agree that the internal affairs of Russia or any other country is a proper subject of world discussion and world opinion. We got them to agree to take the OSCE mission there. I think it's very important to do that. And I hope that we've gotten an increased amount of concern for civilian casualties. So we'll have to see, but I think it's very important we follow up on the commitments made earlier at the OSCE meeting in Istanbul.

Q. Mr. President, Bulgarian national television. Are you going to discuss with our President different ways for compensating Bulgaria for our losses during the embargo against Yugoslavia and Iraq, about \$10 billion?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, let me say I'm very grateful for the support we received, the Allies received during the conflict in Kosovo, and for the direction taken by Bulgaria under this President and this Government. And we are committed to supporting Bulgaria over the long run—economically, politically, militarily. And I think we will be doing it for many years, and I'm looking forward to that.

Situation in Kosovo

Q. Mr. President, in Kosovo tomorrow, will you urge ethnic Albanians to stop their reprisal attacks against Serbs?

President Clinton. In Kosovo tomorrow I will make a very strong statement about the importance of everybody getting over this ethnic hatred and going beyond it. And we have all made a big commitment to Kosovo as an economic and political reconstruction. But I think it's very important that Kosovo, in effect, not become the mirror image of Serbia. It's hard not to, but it's important not to. And we'll keep working on it.

But I wouldn't overreact to the stories, you know, and the facts—a lot of good things have happened there since the end of the

war. And it hasn't been very long, and there is a long, long history in Kosovo and throughout Serbia, throughout the Balkans, that we're trying to get beyond.

Again, I'd say Bulgaria is a very good example of the direction we ought to take, and I hope we can have a positive impact in Kosovo. I think we can.

President Stoyanov. It's important that we, through the American people, through the eyes of the American President, the American people will realize that the Bulgarian people have embarked upon a new road and chosen a new policy, that of democracy, of respect for human rights and that, also, through its wonderful relations with all its neighbors and its excellent ethnic—the absence of ethnic problems whatsoever, Bulgaria will be an example of stability on this continent and will continue to be so.

NATO Bases in Bulgaria

Q. Will you inform us if you discuss the issue of NATO bases in this country?

President Stoyanov. We'll inform you about anything with pleasure, with the greatest of pleasure.

President Clinton. Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 11 a.m. in the Anteroom at the Presidency. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Ivan Kostov of Bulgaria and an Exchange With Reporters in Sofia

November 22, 1999

Prime Minister Kostov. I have just asked the President to say a few words before he goes out of the Council of Ministers. He was kind to respond, and I thank him for that.

President Clinton. Well, first, I want to say again how pleased and honored I am to be in Bulgaria and how strongly I support and admire the political, economic, and military reforms that the Government has undertaken and how grateful I am for the support that Europe and the United States received during the recent difficulties in Kosovo.

I think it is very important for the United States to support Bulgaria's aspirations for

political, economic, and military integration into the West and to support the Stability Pact and the economic and political revitalization of all of southeastern Europe.

I would like to make one other point, which is that I am especially grateful for Bulgaria's policy and history of tolerance and cooperation among different groups of people within this country. If that had been the policy of Serbia in these last 10 years, we would be living in a very different and better time.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

Q. [Inaudible]

President Clinton. No, that did not come up. But we talked generally about the importance of doing things that would be economically beneficial to Bulgaria. I would remind you, my Secretary of Commerce, Mr. Daley, was here just a few weeks ago for an economic conference. And we are moving ahead with a whole set of plans, which I hope will be highly beneficial to Bulgaria economically. But we did not discuss the specific question you asked.

Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 12:50 p.m. at the Council of Ministers Building. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks to the People of Bulgaria in Sofia

November 22, 1999

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President Stoyanov, Prime Minister Kostov, Mayor Sofianski, the people of Bulgaria, I thank you for this wonderful, wonderful welcome. I also want to thank this young student, who must have been so nervous, Boryana Savova. If she is a representative of the young people of Bulgaria, your future is in very good hands.

I am honored tonight to be here with my daughter, three Members of the United States Congress, and a distinguished group of Americans. We thank you for this welcome. We thank all the musicians who performed, all the people who worked so hard to put this wonderful crowd together.

And I would like to say a special word of thanks to the young woman who sang so mag-

nificently both the national anthems of Bulgaria and the United States.

I am very proud to be the first American President to visit Bulgaria—a free Bulgaria. I am proud to stand in this place where voices were silenced for too long. Here are these tens of thousands of people, exercising your freedom with dignity and pride.

We are here tonight because of what you did 10 years ago this month, when change swept through Nevsky Square. Students, never before allowed to express their opinions, demanded free elections now. Writers, imprisoned just a few weeks before, led chants of *demokratiya*. Grandparents, never allowed to worship with their children, said prayers in public, in the shadow of this great cathedral. What a wonderful moment that was. What a wonderful thing it said to the rest of the world about the heart of Bulgaria.

Even before 1989, communist rulers tried to keep you down with violence, but you struggled peacefully. They fed you lies, yet you sought the truth. They tried to smother your spirit, yet you were able to come together here and demand to be citizens, with rights and responsibilities of your own.

When the cold war ended, it took much longer for the ground here to thaw. You endured one false spring after another. Now that democracy is beginning to truly take root, some here must feel left behind, while others race ahead. I ask you to remember what you left behind: a police state, with no room for disappointment, because there was no hope for improvement; when nobody felt left behind because no one was allowed to get ahead; when there were no dreams and some Bulgarians were even robbed of their very identities, forced to change their names. The struggle for your constitutional democracy was waged not for paradise but for possibility, not for a perfect world but for the chance to build a better world.

In my own country, we have struggled now for more than 200 years to build what our Founders called “a more perfect Union,” never completely perfect but always advancing the cause of freedom and responsibility, of individual opportunity and a stronger national community. In those 223 years, we have had to overcome slavery and civil war, depressions and World Wars, discrimination